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Gates is gored

Panel says he passed buck

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WASHINGTON — Acting CIA Director Robert Gates was bloodied in a second day of Senate confirmation hearings yesterday.

He was accused by Republican Sen. Arlen Specter (Pa.) of "dissembling" to the Senate Intelligence Committee and by New Jersey Democrat Bill Bradley of "passing the buck."

Gates, who had hoped to sail through only one day of confirmation hearings, instead found himself scheduled for a third day of testimony. Intelligence panel Chairman David Boren (D-Okla.) said the unit would see Gates behind closed doors in about two weeks before deciding whether to approve his nomination to succeed the ailing William Casey.

'Candor'

Although Boren praised Gates for his "candor," other committee members were not as enthusiastic.

Specter said there was "an element of dissembling" in Gates' testimony about his actions when he first learned that the U.S. may have diverted funds from the sale of arms to Iran into the coffers of the Nicaraguan Contras.

Bradley contended that the CIA's failure to tip off the committee about the Iran-Contra connection was "clearly a betrayal of congressional confidence."

Said Bradley: "So you basically passed the buck to Poindexter?"

Adm. John Poindexter was at the time President Reagan's national security adviser, who ultimately was ousted because of the scandal.

"Now you can call that passing the buck," Gates replied. "I call it trying to get (the information) into the hands of those who are better prepared to evaluate the information we had gotten."

Meanwhile, Gates stirred controversy—and anguish at the State Department—when he disclosed that the agency routinely sends CIA officers overseas each summer to substitute for vacationing U.S. diplomats.

State Department diplomats spend a lot of time in hostile nations denying charges that they are really with the CIA—and Gates' testimony was certain to weaken that contention.

Gates also insisted that he warned Casey last September that shipping arms to Iran should be "called off because the whole policy was a bad idea." At the time, Gates was the agency's No. 2 man.

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